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THE CRIPPLE AND HIS PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY

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For many generations the cripple has occupied a rather obscure place in the community, and has not had sufficient chance to share equally in all opportunities offered to normal children and adults. It is true that many individuals representing various organizations have been interested in the cripple and have helped in securing proper medical treatment for both crippled children and adults in some communities and limited educational advantages in others. Yet they have been unable, because of very apparent and justifiable reasons, to interpret to the community the real individual behind the handicap.

However, through industrial accident boards the needs of the adult cripple have become increasingly more apparent. As a result of recent infantile paralysis epidemics some of the immediate and pressing needs of children have also become apparent, stimulating in the community a deeper interest in both these groups. Although industrial accidents and infantile paralysis,—both serious causes of crippling conditions,—have increased the total cripple population, the community has not been aroused until the present time, to take any active steps in carrying out a constructive program, thus indicating their recognition of the significance of this group in community life.

Now, because of the war, the care of the returned crippled soldier forces the community to immediate action. Already, plans for his medical care, for educational, vocational, and industrial opportunities are well organized. Everything is being done to assure him of a permanent place in the normal life of the community. As a prospective idle dependent he is realized to be an undesirable citizen, so every chance for expressing himself in the kind of work he is best fitted for, by education, training, and physical condition, is to be open to him. It has even been said that a plan for some readjustment of the Workmen's Compensation and Liability Act is to be made, thus releasing the employer from the extra rates of insurance,—an expense incurred by employing handicapped labor.

All this means that the industrial world will be open to him and it is for him to choose his place. He will not have to face an unkindly and prejudiced community because of a slight physical difference. Such has often been the fate of the peace-time cripple.

These new developments, naturally, have an indirect influence upon the future of the peace-time cripple. They assure him that the cripple will no longer be judged by his slight physical difference, but by what he can offer to the community. It is true that many peace-time cripples have lived out their lives heroically and successfully and are holding positions of responsibility. This means that they made the most of the chances that came their way. Stories are often told of the successful individual cripple but such stories have never been accumulated in any available form that might serve as an inspiration and guide to other cripples, and to interested persons in this field of work.

At a meeting in Boston a member of the Committee on Vocational Training for Disabled Soldiers in discussing their work said that, at the very beginning of work before definite plans were made, they had asked for such material. They wished to know what cripples have been doing all these years; whether they had been successful in large numbers; if so, whether cripples with the same type of disability showed any tendency to follow any particular line of occupation; and whether they had been successful in that. Such contributions would have been invaluable as a guide. They soon learned, however, that information of this kind was not available in this field in the United States; therefore they were compelled to look to France and other allied countries for advice.

Social agencies, institutions, or whatever may be the type of organization working with cripples are the natural sources to look to for whatever information may be had about this group. It is, however, true that they are working with a limited number of cripples in their field and can, therefore, judge of their limitations and abilities by highly selected facts only. "Unfortunately, it is the many varieties of human failures which come as a grist to the social worker's mill and diagnostic studies are essential for the determination of what can be done by this or that treatment of the human material at hand."¹ For lack of time and funds it has not

¹ "Psychology and Social Case Work" by Dr. William Healey, National Conference of Social Work, 1917.

been the custom to diagnose an entire field of work—such as cripples—in order to get a background and learn from those who have no reason to come to the knowledge of any of these sources. At once the question might be asked if this is a feasible plan and if it has ever been tried.²

THE CRIPPLE SURVEY IN CLEVELAND

For such information it would be well worth while to look to the City of Cleveland, Ohio, a typical American city, which has made a diagnosis of its cripple problem and so knows all its cripple children and adults, their failures and their successes.

A group of persons, representing five different types of agencies, working with cripples were interested in child welfare work; the general condition of the handicapped; and the industrial chances of the handicapped. Having reached a stage in the development of their work where it seemed impossible to serve the community and cripples helpfully unless they could obtain some further light on their particular problem they too looked about for information on cripples in general, but could find nothing available in the United States. At this point they were advised to diagnose the entire problem in their city in order to get a clear idea of what had been done and what was needed. This seemed a colossal task but plans were soon under way for a city-wide house-to-house canvas, including both rich and poor. It was to be a democratic survey in every sense of the word and looked to the living sources of the community to contribute their share to make it a successful undertaking.

The social agencies of Cleveland, at first, thought that they surely knew all the cripples in their city. But after trying out a fairly typical section of the city, they were convinced by the results that they had in the past judged the problem by limited groups. The same proportions of new cripples—65 per cent unknown to social agencies—were found by the surveyors in all districts. A larger proportion of unknown crippled adults was found. This at once suggested that the adult cripples are not the dependents that one is led to think. It is so easy for the uninformed public to judge the entire crippled population by the unfortunate cripple who may

² "Education and Occupations of Cripples, Juvenile and Adult," by Lucy Wright and Amy M. Hamburger, Published for Welfare Federation, Cleveland, Ohio, by Douglas C. McMurtrie, New York City, 1918.

wish to spend his life selling shoe-strings and pencils on the street corner because he finds it profitable to do so. In the whole city about 150,000 families were visited and the total number of cripples recorded, including those known to social agencies, schools, hospitals, homes, almshouses, etc., was 4,186.

The response from the cripples themselves was most gratifying. When they were asked to contribute from their successes or experiences in life, to the encouragement and inspiration of others similarly crippled, or to tell the obstacles to be overcome before the cripple could be assured of any encouragement, they most graciously and joyously responded. Some were amazed that they should be considered cripples, even though they were without an arm or leg, or perhaps seriously crippled as a result of infantile paralysis. They had never considered themselves handicapped in any sense.

I remember well my visit to a man who had lost his right arm to the elbow and who was actually amused at being considered a cripple. His home was in a very respectable neighborhood of detached cottages. In response to my knock a man's voice bade me come in. I entered a large sunny kitchen, where this cripple was busily "washing up," as he called it, for dinner. He continued while he asked me who I was, where I came from, the purpose of such a survey, and the source of the financial support of such an undertaking. He emphatically said he wished to be connected with no philanthropic scheme. I explained everything from the purpose to the source of finances including the names of our committee members. As I finished he said, "I call that a fine piece of educational work, for you are not only learning about us but you are teaching the people of Cleveland that we are not an idle, begging lot, but men and women like the rest of you, with your good qualities and your failings, and that we want the same chance. We want you all to see us as we are,—real men and women with a slight physical difference but the same otherwise, and able to hold our own with you if given the chance." He then invited me to join his wife in the living-room where he told me his story.

He was one of a large family, whose parents were respectable, hard-working people. After graduating from grammar school, feeling the necessity of earning money and having a marked mechanical interest, he decided to learn the machinist's trade. Unfortunately at the age of 24 years,—he was then a skilled steamfitter,—he met

with an accident which resulted in the loss of his arm. The company made no settlement, as they considered the accident due to his own carelessness, and as he could not continue in his present work "he grit his teeth" and determined to use his savings for "educational help." He took a special course in mechanical engineering in a technical college, which he soon realized was beyond him because of his meager preparation. But he was not easily discouraged and went to an institution in a distant city where he took a course in mechanical drawing. At the completion, in a year, he asked to be given a chance in their workshop; they at first refused but later consented to employ him. Here he did all kinds of drafting. After a few years he went back to his home city, studied to be a first-class marine engineer, got his license and applied for a job. From now on he met his greatest obstacles. Unconsciously he had a habit of putting his disabled arm in his pocket and often was on the point of securing a much desired job, when the arm would as unconsciously come out of his pocket and the possibilities of work were gone. One day in sheer desperation, after being refused many times, he returned to one employer and said, "How do you know what a one-armed man can or can not do? You have never hired one. Why don't you hire one and give him the chance to show what he can do?" He was hired, at his own risk, as first-class engineer on one of the lake boats, where he remained for about 15 years. He earned \$175 a month. Because of his wife's ill-health he recently gave up his work. He, however, carries on a small business as automobile repairer and installer of heaters. He can handle all kinds of tools and do all the necessary processes of work in both jobs with the exception of cutting pipes.

In discussing the problem of cripples he gave from his own experience and good judgment much helpful advice. Among other things he said:

Don't judge all cripples by the loafers on the street corners. They are usually so from their own choice, or ill-advised help of their friends, and often would be just the same if they were not handicapped. Don't make us a separate class. We are the same as the rest of you. Judge us by what we have left, not by what we have lost. Put aside philanthropic schemes but stand ready to give us helpful advice when we are first disabled. This is the time we need it and need the right kind of friends. Steer us into the right occupation. Tell us about others who have been successful. Provide educational opportunities and training for children.

This successful cripple, with his fine philosophy of life and determination of character was a type of many men and women constantly being found through this survey. Consequently, the first definition of cripple: "A person whose muscular movements are so far restricted by accident or disease as to affect his capacity for self-support," was gradually abandoned and the purpose of the survey became: "To discover the economic and educational needs, capacities, and possibilities of children and adults in Cleveland who are handicapped because they lack the normal use of skeletal or skeleton muscles." This latter made it possible to carry out the original plan of making it a democratic survey.

As a result of such a broad purpose, the types of handicap considered were many, from loss of two or more fingers or a thumb, to a combination of most disabling conditions. This brought the work into a varied field of occupations,—so varied that there seemed to be no prevailing type of crippled persons following one special line of work. It is interesting to know that among 3250 persons over 15 years of age including 400 housewives, who were considered self-supporting, 58 per cent were employed and they represented every known disability recorded.

These industries and occupations were carefully classified in the hope that some further light might be found about the choice of occupations of the one-armed, or armless cripples; the one-legged or legless cripples; the cripples with other kinds of disabling conditions. However, the successful cripples most obviously adapted themselves to the type of work they were qualified to do. Three armless men were found following three distinctly different lines; one is a beggar, spending his time on the street corner; the second, a street peddler who, with reins about his neck, drives a small team through the streets; and the third, a judge in the District Court who wrote his bar examinations holding a pencil between his teeth. This is his only method of writing because his arms are amputated close to his shoulders, thus preventing the use of artificial arms.

Among the legless cripples were: a beggar of fine physique, unfortunately, undisciplined in youth, sitting in the hotel doorway, asking alms under the pretext of selling gum, and averaging from \$15 to \$30 a week, according to his mother's statement; a successful stenographer employed by a real estate company, earning \$17 a

week; a successful salesman in the employ of an artificial limb company earning \$100 a month, who said he could run and dance like a normal man, although to the keenly observant person, a slight limp and slight stiffness of one limb could be detected. There was also the skillful cartoonist with a congenital paralysis of one arm, and a defect of one leg, whose entire life has been as much like that of a normal person's as his judicious parents could make it. So unaccustomed was he to thinking of his handicap that he was almost startled when he was informed by his mother that she had reported him as a cripple to the surveyor. He dances, swims, play tennis with one hand, and enjoys the usual activities of the normal man.

These are merely types of innumerable cripples visited in this survey. Each is different, showing clearly character defects and the variable mental attitude that plays such an important part in directing the failures or successes of the cripple in the economic world,—as important a part as his physical disability and in some cases more.

Of the total number at work 54 per cent were earning a living for themselves. Over one-half of this number were supporting themselves in addition to others. Only a small number of those unemployed were receiving industrial pensions, which immediately raises the question as to whether industry is bearing its just burden in relation to the number of accidents.

The number unemployed, of course, was greater among those having the heaviest kind of handicap although large numbers of those with serious disabilities were at work. The man with double club hands and club feet illustrates the latter type. His parents were Polish immigrants who were illiterate and who never learned to speak English. This man was the oldest of 21 children born in a remote town in Kansas. Although his parents realized his deformity, no doctor was consulted until he was about five years old—his mother had a midwife at birth. As his father was a laborer earning \$1.10 a day, the doctor's price was beyond their means, and no further medical advice was sought. Until 12 years of age he was dragged about in a cart by his younger brothers and sisters. About that time the family moved to Cleveland. A shoe-maker in the neighborhood offered to make shoes for him which would enable him to walk. He also taught him to make his own shoes, which he does to this day. From that time he was no longer dependent, and, best of all, he could go to school, an unexpected but longed-for joy. Be-

cause the family income was so small, he felt after five years of schooling that he must go to work. During this time no suggestion of public hospital was made to him or to his parents by teacher or neighbors. Therefore, with practically no use of his hands, selling newspapers seemed the only opening.

He is now 35 years old, and with the exception of a year when he tried the experiment of keeping a cigar store which was not a profitable business venture he has sold papers on a street corner. He has also some regular customers in office buildings. Both parents are dead and he is the support of a sister and two children, and two young sisters whom he hopes to send to high school. Very frankly he said:

My parents were simple, ignorant people who did the best they knew how. I have no complaint to make. I am strong and vigorous. I like to work and am thankful for the opportunity because I must support my family. It is not too much of a care and it gives me something to be responsible for, and a reason to make a home. Think of the types of people with whom I come in contact: think of the side of life that has been revealed to me and from which I can guide my family. No, I have no complaint to make but I trust all cripples may have proper medical treatment; that they may have educational advantages; and that you may interpret us to the community, especially to employers. Both are strongly prejudiced and unwilling to take us for what we are.

This kind of occupation with no future to it would not be advisable for every cripple to follow, but no one watching this man at his work could doubt his businesslike attitude in close competition with the very alive young newsboys who frequent his corner.

The results of this survey may seem so optimistic that one might easily assume that no further plans are necessary for cripples. But when it is known that one-half the total number were crippled in childhood, and that one-fourth of the total crippled population were under the age of 15 years at the time of the survey, very important plans suggest themselves and are already under way in Cleveland.

The importance of making such a survey cannot be overestimated either for Cleveland or other cities. It has not only given the interested groups and social workers in Cleveland a general knowledge of their crippled population in all its phases, but has also given them and others undisputable facts by which to judge this problem fairly. From now on mistaken ideas about cripples

can be dropped. Here is an opportunity to put them right, so to speak, in the minds of their neighbors who are apt to have very wrong ideas about the ambition, ability, and economic status of those who do not present the same outward appearance. From Cleveland, a city largely without industrial training either before or after disablement, where cripples unaided have contributed to their own successful economic independence, much can be learned. The lives of unknown cripples are much more normal than had been supposed, although, because of unequal chances, they have undoubtedly often followed the line of least resistance.

The important fact to be faced is that cripples must be divided into two large classes,—the helpable by normal educational means and the helpable by specially devised means. By the former is meant those who are able physically and mentally to share normal opportunities of life; by the latter is meant those who are unable physically and mentally to share normal opportunities of life and whom it is not human to force beyond their ability. They should be aided to live out their lives happily with the limited equipment they have. With this division it will be much simpler to establish the normal place of the cripple in the community. To accomplish this means something more than case work with individuals; it means more surveys like Cleveland's, and educational campaigns, legislation, etc., as a basis for needed plans.

What do the cripples themselves want? Turning again to the life stories of the successful ones, they want:

- 1—Not to be confused with the begging type of cripple.
- 2—Not to be forced into a special class.
- 3—An opportunity to be judged by what is left and not by what is gone.
- 4—To be given an opportunity to make the contribution of which each is capable.
- 5—To share equally in all chances offered to normal individuals.

This is the appeal from normal, thoughtful cripples to interested individuals, organizations and social workers for an active share in life. The task then, is to extend permanently to all the advantages of community life.